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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9159
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1221
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8222
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 6436
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4644
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2515
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4603
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3709
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8874
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6253
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0823
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3099
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000044

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ARMY TAKES ELEPHANT PASS; NOW CONTROLS
ENTIRE LAND ROUTE TO JAFFNA

REF: A) COLOMBO 0033 B) COLOMBO 0025

¶1. (U) In a significant victory, the Sri Lankan Army completed its reconquest of the entire Jaffna peninsula by seizing control of the key base at Elephant Pass, held by the "Tamil Tigers" (LTTE) since 2000. On January 9, the President announced in an address to the nation that after heavy fighting, the key Tiger-held base of Elephant Pass, which the Tigers had occupied since 2000, had fallen to the Sri Lankan military. (Note: The Sri Lankan Army established Elephant Pass in the 1970s to serve as the main logistics point for several camps in the Vanni and the Jaffna peninsula.) The President noted that the government now controls the entire A-9 highway from Kandy to Jaffna - the main travel and supply route to Sri Lanka's north - for the first time in 23 years.

¶2. (SBU) The capture of the A-9 road occurred less than two months after the capture of the main northwestern coastal route, the A-32 Mannar-Pooneryn highway, on November 15, 2008, a much less well-developed and practicable route to Jaffna. The President emphasized in his speech that the LTTE would no longer be able to assess taxes on civilians and goods traveling on the A-9. In fact, when the route re-opens for commercial traffic it should help to reduce the highly inflated food prices in Jaffna caused by lowering transport costs. Moreover, the consolidation of government control over the entire Jaffna peninsula will also allow the Army to redeploy its forces in Jaffna for the final assault on the Tigers' remaining redoubt in and around Mullaitivu and should hasten the end of the LTTE as a semi-conventional force (ref A addresses in more detail the strategic significance of the government's recent victories).

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Coming just one week after the Tigers' de-facto capital Kilinochchi fell to the Sri Lankan Army, the loss of Elephant Pass and the entire Jaffna peninsula comes as a major blow to the Tiger's morale and prestige. The Sri Lankan government hopes its success will also dampen enthusiasm among the large and prosperous Tamil Diaspora for providing funds to the LTTE. Our sources indicate that the fall of Elephant Pass may in fact have occurred on January 8, but the government held back the news to allow the Army's

53rd and 55th divisions to complete their sweep southeastward from the former Forward Defense Line and take possession of the entire Jaffna peninsula. It is also possible that the government thought that the day the Sunday Leader editor was assassinated (ref b) might not be propitious for announcing a major military victory.
Blake